



U.S. Department of Justice

Civil Rights Division

Office of the Assistant Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20530

DEC - 1 2011

The Honorable Cheri M. Barry
Mayor, City of Meridian
2412 Seventh St
Post Office Box 1430
Meridian, MS 39302-1430

Re: Investigation of the Meridian Police Department

Dear Mayor Barry:

This is to inform you that the United States Department of Justice is commencing an investigation concerning allegations that the Meridian Police Department (“MPD”) is violating the Fourth Amendment, Due Process, and Equal Protection rights of juveniles who are referred for law enforcement action by the Meridian Public School District. The investigation will be conducted pursuant to the pattern or practice provision of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, 42 U.S.C. § 14141 (“Section 14141”), which prohibits any governmental agency with responsibility for the administration juvenile justice from engaging in a pattern or practice that deprives juveniles of constitutional or federal statutory rights, and the anti-discrimination provision of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin by recipients of federal financial assistance. The investigation will be conducted in conjunction with an investigation by the Department of Justice concerning allegations that the Lauderdale County Juvenile Court is violating the Fourth Amendment, Due Process, and Equal Protection rights of juveniles from Meridian. By separate letter today to the Honorable Frank Coleman, we provided notice of the investigation of the Lauderdale County Juvenile Court.

The investigation will seek to determine whether there are systemic violations of the Constitution or laws of the United States by sworn law enforcement officers of MPD. We have not reached any conclusions about the subject matter of the investigation. We believe that you and other Meridian officials want to operate MPD consistent with the requirements of the Constitution and federal law. During the course of our investigation, we will consider all relevant information, particularly the efforts that Meridian has undertaken to ensure compliance with the Constitution and federal law.

Should we identify deficiencies during the investigation, we will provide real time technical assistance, where possible and appropriate. Upon completion of our investigation, if we conclude that there are no systemic violations of constitutional or federal statutory rights by MPD, we will notify you that we are closing the investigation. If, on the other hand, we conclude that there are federal violations, we will take appropriate action, beginning with informing you of the findings and attempting to work with Meridian to remedy these violations.

In our years of enforcing Section 14141, the good faith efforts of state and local jurisdictions working with us have enabled us to resolve our investigations without resort to contested litigation. We can assure you that we will seek to minimize any potential disruption our efforts may have on the operations of MPD.

Our Special Litigation Section will be handling this matter and will contact your office to discuss the next steps. The Chief of the Special Litigation Section, Jonathan M. Smith, may be reached at 202-514-5393, and Deputy Chief Shelley Jackson may be reached at 202-305-3373.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Perez
Assistant Attorney General

cc: Chief Lee Shelbourn
Meridian Police Department
2415 Sixth Street
Meridian, MS 39301

Ronnie Walton
City Attorney
1724 A 23rd Street
Meridian, MS 39302

Alfred B. Jernigan, Jr.
Assistant U. S. Attorney
Chief, Civil Division
Southern District of Mississippi
501 E. Court Street, Ste. 4.430
Jackson, MS 39201